

# Max Taylor



Class of 2019  
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As a comedian, Chicago had always felt like a fantasy place, a mecca in which improvisers and sketch-writers were seen as esteemed artists rather than just entertainers. For this reason, I felt compelled to make my pilgrimage. Improv comedy has become increasingly popular across the country and all over the world. As I worked alongside students from Los Angeles, New York, Australia, Poland, and Scotland, I realized that we were all there for the same reason: to tap into the very source of this cultural phenomenon and bring it back to our own unique comedy scenes.

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## DISCOVERING COMEDY AS PHILOSOPHY IN CHICAGO

I began intensive writing classes at The Second City, the starting point for comedy giants such as Tina Fey, Keegan-Michael Key, and Stephen Colbert. Throughout the four weeks of increasingly advanced material, I was expected to write 1-2 complete sketches per night. My group became more and



more tightly-knit as the course progressed. As we neared the end of our time together, we agreed that we didn't want our time as collaborating comedians to come to a close on the last day of class. Instead, my group took the initiative to devise an original sketch revue show on an authentic Second City stage. In under a week we had planned, rehearsed, and performed our show, "How Cool's That?," at the Judy's Beat Lounge theater at Second City. The fact that a group of kids from all over the country could attain even a small success in the Chicago comedy scene in under four weeks helped me understand why this city is truly a promised land for aspiring performers.

The beginning of July meant the beginning of the Improv Olympic (IO) theater's summer improv



intensive. As I came to learn during my time at IO, improv is more of a philosophy than a talent. It is deeply based in trust, love, and collaboration with your scene partners. The "comedy" in improv comedy doesn't derive from cracking jokes or trying to steal the show; it comes from the antics that ensue when two people who have no idea what they're doing trust and support each other wholeheartedly. While Second City was an incredible scholarly experience for me, I would describe my time at IO as more of a spiritual experience.

My section was comprised of more international students than Americans. We were 6 Americans, 4 Poles, 1 Australian, 1 Scot, 1 Icelander, and 1 Finn, with various foreign students we met and befriended across other sections. The introduction to the program focused on group bonding and cohesion. We learned how to act together as one mind. I

and my classmates returned to the theater most nights to watch and critique shows. We even commuted to promising shows at nearby theaters, becoming friends in only a matter of days.

All of this practice culminated in a performance at IO's Summer Intensive Showcase. It was the most fun I'd had doing improv; all of our friends, teachers, and fellow students packed The Mission Theater, rooting for us. Afterwards, there were



many tearful goodbyes and hopeful promises of buying plane tickets to Poland. We had been warned at the beginning that the Summer Intensive can be brutal in that it can introduce you to some of your best friends and then rip them away all in a 5-week period. I was amazed by how quickly people of many cultures and backgrounds became so open and honest with one another. It



gave me hope that improv philosophy could be a powerful unifying force in the world. This is certainly a message I want to bring back to my team at UNC. My fellowship experience gave me

more than I could have imagined. It turned a dauntingly large city into a land of opportunity. It taught me how to be an adult, and how to walk an unbeaten path to create something new. It taught me how to relate to my fellow human, no matter where or what they came from. If anything, this is a sign of a truly comprehensive, life-changing experience. Thank you to the Burch Fellowship Committee and to Mr. Burch for providing me with the means to achieve this crucial milestone in my life.